

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERCALL?

The main purpose of an overcall is Lead-Directing, promising in 1st and 2nd seat at least 2 of the top 3 honors. In 3rd seat anything goes!! Secondly, overcalls take away their bidding space, making it harder for them to communicate. Hopefully, we can buy the contract, intending either to make it, or to effectively sacrifice, getting a better score than just letting them play their contract.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO OVERCALL?

An Overcaller guarantees 2 of the top 3 honors, and 6-17 HCP. You must have Suit Quality! There are many different overcalls:

- Weak Jump Overcalls (Weak Two or Three overcall)
- Strong Jump (which is Invitational over a weak opening)
- 2 suited overcalls (such as Unusual 2 NT or Michaels Cuebid)

HOW TO DETERMINE HOW HIGH YOU CAN OVERCALL

It's all about the SUIT QUALITY! Add up the length of the suit you wish to bid, plus the number of honors in the suit. If it adds up to 7, you have enough to overcall at the one-level. If it adds up to 8, you have enough to overcall at the two-level. If it adds up to 9, you can bid at the three-level, etc.

For example :

- AQ543 = 5+2 (length + 2 honors) = 7. You can only overcall this suit at the one-level.
- AQ6543 = 6+2 (length + 2 honors) = 8. Feel free to overcall this suit at the two-level.

EXAMPLES OF OVERCALLS

- 1-level suit overcall promises 6-17 points, and a 5+ card suit with at least 2 honors.
- 1-level 1 NT overcall promises 15-18 points, balanced, with at least 1 stopper in the enemy's suit. (And by agreement, systems are on.)
- 2-level suit overcall that is not a jump promises a 6+ card suit with at least 2 of the top honors and an outside entry -- either an Ace or King.
- A 2-level overcall in the suit the opponent just bid is a Michaels Cuebid. It shows 5/5 in the majors when overcalling a minor. Overcalling a major, it shows 5/5 in the other major and an unspecified minor.
- 2-level jump-overcall in a suit is the same as a "weak two" opener, intending to get in their way.
- 2-level jump to 2 NT is the Unusual 2 NT, showing at least 5/5 in the two lowest unbid suits.
- 2 NT overcall over their "weak two" shows 15-18 balanced, (a 1 NT opener) with at least 1 stopper.
- 3-level jump-overcall in a suit, over a 1-level opener, is preemptive, with 6 (over a major) or 7 pieces.
- 3-level jump-overcall in a suit, over their "weak two," is a strong hand, with a long and strong suit, and is invitational to game.
- 3-level jump to 3 NT is game in your own hand, promising at least one (and preferably 2) stoppers in their suit, and a long running minor -- 8 or 9 tricks in your hand.

HOW TO OVERCALL WITH A STRONGER HAND

With 18+ points, start with a Takeout Double. Then override whatever partner's advance is by bidding your own suit. This shows a long, strong suit and a hand that badly wants to be in game! If you have 19 or more, no long suit, and no stopper in opener's suit, and want to be in game after the double, cue-bid the opener's suit asking for a stopper in that suit for 3 NT. Else return to their first bid suit. Like this:

You hold ♠ AQ3 ♥ xxx ♦ AKJ3 ♣ AK32

1 ♥ - X - P - 2 ♣

P - 2 ♥ ← this is a cue bid asking for a heart stopper.

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

		♠ K 9 5		
		♥ J 9		
		♦ K Q 10 5 3		
		♣ K 6 3		
♠ 4 3			♠ A Q J 8 7	
♥ A K 10 5 4 3			♥ Q 7 2	
♦ 4			♦ A 8	
♣ A 10 5 4			♣ J 9 2	
		♠ 10 6 2		
		♥ 8 6		
		♦ J 9 7 6 2		
		♣ Q 8 7		

West	North	East	South
	1 ♦	1 ♠	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	All pass		

Auction Commentary: North has 12 HCP and a 5-card ♦ suit -- and that 5th piece adds 1 point. 12 HCP + 1 length point = 13 points. East overcalls with a good 5-card suit with at least 2 top honors. (*NEVER overcall a crummy suit!*) The overcall could be as few as 6 points, but could be as many as 16. Advancer has a good hand, a good ♥ suit, and doesn't really want to play in ♠s, so he changes the overcall to his own suit, 2 ♥. By agreement, the new suit here is non-forcing and constructive. So, East could pass it and they could play in 2 ♥. But East has a better hand (than just a 6-point overcall!), so the 3 ♥ call shows support and is an invitation to game. West accepts the invitation.

Opening Lead: K♦ (promising the Q♦)

Planning the Play: PLAN! West must leave the Q♥ in dummy, as an entry to the good spades later. Win the A♦, and draw a round of trump by playing up to the K♥. Finesse the K♠, and when it works, it's clear to repeat the finesse! Draw another round of trump to the A♥, (*and you know the missing 4 trumps divided 2 - 2, so there are no more trumps*). Repeat the ♠ finesse. Now play the A♠, discard a ♣, and watch the K♠ fall. Your 8♠ and 7♠ are set up, so cash those and "pitch" the two losing ♣s. Just 25 HCP in your hands, and you made all 13 tricks! Wow!

Takeaways:

1. Counting all the suits like the experts do takes a lot of training, and a lot of playing. When you made your plan for this hand, it involved trying the ♠ finesse to set up the ♠s for discarding losing ♣s. You don't have to count ALL the suits here. Do you care at all about the ♦s? No. Do you care about who has which ♣s? No. You only care that both defenders followed to the 3 ♠ tricks. If a suit is important to you, count it. DISREGARD the other ones :) (So while you were counting trumps, if someone pitched a ♠, you would have made a mental note for later.)

2. When partner overcalls, and you advance his overcall by bidding your own suit, you also promise 5 pieces in yours. **Overcall = 5+ pieces. Changing overcall = 5+ pieces. Live by it!**

Board 4West Deals
Both Vul

♠ 4 3	♠ A Q 10 7 5	♠ J 9 6									
♥ Q 10 7	♥ J 8 6	♥ 9 5 3									
♦ A K 10 9 2	♦ 8 5	♦ Q J 4									
♣ A 9 5	♣ K J 8	♣ 10 6 4 2									
<table style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto; text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>				N		W		E		S	
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ K 8 2										
	♥ A K 4 2										
	♦ 7 6 3										
	♣ Q 7 3										

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♦	1 ♠	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♠	All pass	

Auction Commentary: Responder does not have enough in HCP to speak. The advancer has too much for a simple raise to 2 ♠, and a jump to 3 ♠ would be preemptive with 4-card support. Therefore, when holding 2 or more defensive tricks we cue-bid* the opener's suit. This is an artificial bid that promises at least 3-card support for partner, and at least a "limit raise" in value. It asks about the strength of the overcall, offering up the possibility of game if finding a fit means North overcalled with the equivalent of around 15 points. Overcaller rebids the suit to show a minimum hand. It's up to the advancer now, in case there is more than a "limit raise," because North is now done bidding. * *This cuebid is standard treatment, and is not alertable.*

Opening Lead: Q♦ (top of partner's suit)

Planning the Play: In a suit contract, declarer must first count the losers. The contract is 2 ♠s, so declarer can afford to lose 5 tricks. Losers are 1 ♥ trick, 2 ♦ tricks, and a ♣. To avoid a trump loser, they must break 3/2 in the opponents' hands. To avoid losing to Jxxx♠, or to avoid an overruff by East with the J♠ (if West had 6 ♦s), when a 3rd ♦ is played declarer must discard a ♥ from his hand. It's going to be a loser anyway. Now West can't lead still another ♦, lest he give declarer a "ruff and a sluff," which usually gives declarer an extra trick! Exchanging a "Loser on a Loser" is great!

Takeaway:

A "Loser on Loser" is a declarer play, typically in a trump contract. It's any play where instead of ruffing, the declarer discards a loser card, (one that is bound to be given up anyway), on an opponent's winner. It substitutes one loser for another, to keep trump control.

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

	♠ J 4		
	♥ 6 5 2		
	♦ 10 6 5 4		
	♣ A 9 7 2		
♠ 10 5 3	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ K 7 2	
♥ K J 4		♥ A Q 10 9 8	
♦ K 3 2		♦ Q J 9	
♣ 6 5 4 3		♣ J 10	
	♠ A Q 9 8 6		
	♥ 7 3		
	♦ A 8 7		
	♣ K Q 8		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♥	1 ♠
2 ♥	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	2 ♠	All pass	

Auction Commentary: In the overcall seat, when there is an opening hand and a 5-card major, it is best to overcall that suit first and double later. So South overcalls 1 ♠, and then the rebid of the double is for Takeout: "Partner bid something! We cannot let them play at the 2 -level." North's best choice is to support the ♠s, even with 2 pieces, and let partner's stronger hand be the declarer.

Opening Lead: K♥ (highest of partner's suit), or 4♥ promising an honor (A partnership agreement!)

Planning the Play: Counting losers, South finds 1 ♠ loser, 2 ♥ losers and 2 ♦ losers. On this lead, you'll first lose the 2 ♥ tricks. Since dummy holds 3 ♥s, they might try a third ♥ trick. Ruff it and play a small trump toward the J♠. It's going to lose to the K♠ on your right, but if the trumps break 3/3 you won't lose any more ♠s. Win their minor suit return, and play the ♣s -- high cards from the short side first. Your 4th ♣ in dummy will be a winner when then JT♣s both drop. Pitching a ♦ on that 4th ♣ means you will lose: 2 ♥ tricks, the K♠, and 1 ♦ trick, making an overtrick. (And if they lead a ♦ instead of the third ♥, you won't have time to pitch a ♦, and you will make your 8 needed tricks, instead of 9.)

Takeaway:

Especially NV vs VUL, it's often prudent to not let the opponents play in a 2-level contract. Your double in the balancing seat says PARTNER - let's try to steal this contract -- we might even make it! -- or let's push them up a level, and we may have a shot at defeating them on the next level. (*You have to have the right hand, with a holding that will be able to pass whatever partner chooses!*)

If we push them up, non-vulnerable, good things can happen!

1. If we steal the contract in 2 ♠, and go down one, we've only given them +50 as opposed to +110 if they make 2 ♠.
2. If we push them to 3 ♥, and we set them by 1 trick, we will get +100, because they're vulnerable.

In this particular hand, 2 ♥ loses just 2 ♠s, 1 ♦ and 2 ♣s. They will make their contract.